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UNCLAS PRAGUE 001132

SIPDIS

FOR R AND EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PHUM ASEC EZ

SUBJECT: RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY ANNOUNCES CONTRACT
FOR NEW HEADQUARTERS

¶1. (U) On July 28, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) announced that it had signed a contract with a local developer to build a new, more secure headquarters building for its approximately 600 employees. The signing of the build-to-lease contract marked the end of a long process, begun after the September 11 attacks, to relocate the radios from their current, highly vulnerable headquarters building in downtown Prague. GOCR officials, including the Mayor of Prague Pavel Bem and Foreign Minister Svoboda (whom the Ambassador contacted in advance with the good news), expressed great satisfaction with this significant step forward. The GOCR has been very supportive of keeping the radios in Prague, albeit at a more secure location, and has already transferred a donation for the move (of approximately \$1.2 million) to an escrow account in Washington. The Czech Ambassador to Washington is expected to release the money upon confirmation that the lease is formally signed.

¶2. (U) RFE/RL issued a news release announcing the signing of the contract, as did Orco, the developer selected to build the new headquarters in the Prague 10 district. News coverage was generally straightforward and positive in all news outlets. The radios plan to host a media event celebrating the new contract on September 12, in conjunction with a planned celebration commemorating their 10 years in Prague. Important past and present GOCR officials (including former President Vaclav Havel, who was responsible for bringing the radios to Prague in 1995) and the Ambassador are expected to attend.

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